

Number: Opto 20

Date: October 27, 2005

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Subject: Referring patients to a physician for a consultation

Reference: n/a

To: all optometrists

As a result of recent amendments to the Schedule of Medical Benefits (SOMB), optometrists will need to be prepared to provide their Alberta Health and Wellness Practitioner Identifier (PRAC ID) to physicians when they refer a patient to the physician for an insured consultation service. These SOMB amendments have been made in support of fostering a multi-disciplinary approach to patient care.

Beginning October 1, 2005, Alberta physicians are able to bill the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan for a consultation when a patient has been referred to them by an optometrist. Prior to October 1, physicians could not bill a consultation fee, but could bill for a non-referred visit or a procedure, as applicable. General rule 4.4.1 in the SOMB describes a consultation as:

that situation where a physician, midwife, podiatrist, dentist, optometrist or nurse practitioner after an appropriate examination of the patient, requests the opinion of a consultant physician, and the consultant does a history, an examination and a review of the diagnostic data and provides a written opinion with recommendations as to the treatment, to the referring physician, midwife, podiatrist, dentist, optometrist or nurse practitioner. Consultations may not be claimed for the transfer of care alone.

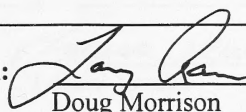
In order to be paid for a consultation, the physician must include the referring optometrist's PRAC ID on their claim. In compliance with privacy legislation, Alberta Health and Wellness does not provide this information to other practitioners. This information must be obtained by the consultant directly from the referring practitioner.

If you would like to view the SOMB amendments that authorize physicians to bill optometrist-referred consultations, you can visit our website at www.health.gov.ab.ca/professionals/SOMB.htm. Click on the link *Medical Governing Rules* and refer to the rules in sections 4.3 "Consultations – Definitions" and 4.4 "Consultation – Application".

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